



State Water Project Briefing: Strategic Plan Safety Goal

Introduction

The second State Water Project (SWP) briefing of 2024 will focus on the SWP's five-year Strategic Plan's safety goal, provide an update on current-year operations, and give the Commission an overview of the recently released economic study of the SWP.

Department of Water Resources (DWR) Acting SWP Deputy Director John Yarbrough will provide a high-level overview of Goal One of the SWP's Strategic Plan: Advance an industry-leading safety culture, with a focus on employee safety, safety through physical and cyber security, and emergency preparedness.

Behzad Soltanzadeh, the SWP Division of Operations and Maintenance (O&M) Manager, will provide an overview of the hazards and complex nature of work completed by DWR employees, and the evolution of the DWR safety program, with a focus on its implementation within the O&M division. The presentation will cover the importance of safety communication, a timeline of safety enhancements at DWR, safety metrics and data collection, and the use of this data to identify trends and reduce injuries, illnesses, and unsafe conditions. It will also detail a continuous improvement plan for overall health and safety at DWR, highlighting the enhancements and improvements made over the past 15 years that showcase DWR's commitment to enhancing the safety culture among its employees.

SWP Water Operations Executive Manager Molly White and SWP Assistant Environmental Deputy Director Lenny Grimaldo will provide an update on current-year operations, including the current water year allocation, planning decisions made to date, hydrology to date, efforts to support threatened fish populations, and considerations for the rest of the year.

SWP Policy Advisor Rylan Gervase will brief the Commission on a recently released report on the economy of the State Water Project. This presentation will cover SWP's importance to California's economy, the project's cost-effectiveness relative to alternative sources of water, and future SWP communications efforts.

Background

The California State Water Project, consisting of 36 water storage facilities and 700 miles of rivers, pipelines, and canals, supplies water to 27 million people and irrigates 750,000 acres of farmland. The system includes 21 pumping plants, powered by a system of power-generation and power-recovery plants. DWR also operates the world's tallest water lift – the Edmonston Pumping Plant – which pumps water more than 1,900 feet up and over the Tehachapi Mountains into Southern California.

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In 2024, DWR released the State Water Project risk-informed Strategic Plan that considers external risks to the continued operation of the SWP. In addition to advancing an industry-leading safety culture, other goals include being an employer of choice; accelerating adaptation and strengthening resiliency for a changing climate; promoting awareness of the SWP's significance; and optimizing infrastructure, financial integrity, and operations.

Goal Two of the Commission's Strategic Plan directs the Commission to remain apprised of the operations and construction activities of the SWP, focusing on how it adapts and responds to hydrological extremes expected with climate change, restores critical ecosystems, and addresses aging infrastructure. As required by Water Code section 165, the Commission conducts an annual review on the progress of the construction and operation of the SWP and reports its findings and recommendations to DWR and the Legislature. This briefing will inform the Commission of SWP activities in preparation for the Commission's 2024 annual review.

Meeting Overview

At the May meeting, DWR staff will make presentations as described above. Commissioners will have an opportunity to ask questions and make comments in anticipation of producing findings and recommendations in the Commission's 2024 annual report on the SWP.

This is an informational item.

Contact

Paul Cambra

Public Information Officer

California Water Commission

(916) 873-5774